

## Combating Agricultural Child Labour for National Development: Implications for the Millenium Development Goals in Nigeria

\* G.N, Ben-Chendo; J. I, Lemchi; F.O,Nwosu; A, Henri-Ukoha; I.U, Nwaiwu

Department of Agricultural Economics,  
Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State  
Corresponding author: [gbenchendo@gmail.com](mailto:gbenchendo@gmail.com)



Abstract

Received: 30 Jun 2011,  
Reviewed: 7 July 2011,  
Revised: 18 July 2011,  
Accepted: 26 July 2011

A simmering crisis in the Nigerian agriculture today involves labour and the crisis manifests itself in the degree of labour availability, labour demand and labour productivity. One of the major products of this crisis is the increased participation of children in paid, non-familiar agricultural jobs. Agriculture ranks as one of the three most dangerous work activities, along with mining and construction. They are frequently employed as farm labourers, bird scarers, food crop harvesters, processors and hawkers. More than 132 million children work in agriculture. Child labour is increasing in postharvest processing, transport, marketing and a range of agroindustries. Child labour is maybe one of the most striking indicators identifying vulnerable children and as such pointing to shortcomings in several of the millennium goals as poverty eradication, education for all, gender equality, combating HIV/AIDS and creation of a global partnership for development. Most working children do so after a decision in their parental household. To understand the household labour supply decisions, relations to the labour market and to public interventions is critical in designing programmes in order to achieve the MDGs. The research on child labour represent in this respect a largely untapped resource of knowledge for policymakers in the fields of agriculture, education programmes and poverty reduction programmes. It is recommended in this paper that the legislators in Nigeria should enact laws that will reduce agricultural child labour through the redistribution of the nations resources, women should be integrated in the fight to combat child labour and that alternative income sources should be provided for rural poor families whose children are the most vulnerable. [ G.N, Ben-Chendo. **Combating Agricultural Child Labour for National Development: Implications for the Millenium Development Goals in Nigeria. International Journal of Agricultural Science, Research and Technology, 2011; 1(2):61-66.**

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Combating, Child, Labour, Development

### 1. Introduction

Work that is exploitative, dangerous and detrimental to the physical, social, moral or spiritual development of children, or inhibits a child's ability to receive a quality, relevant education, is considered hazardous labour and poses a major human rights and socioeconomic challenge (Donli, 2004)

Nearly 70 percent of child laborers are engaged in rural-based economic activities. Agricultural work is the most prevalent form of child labour, and one of the most hazardous (ILO,1999). While interventions by NGOs and other organizations and institutions have targeted the worst forms of exploitative child labour in urban areas, (ILO,2002) the vast majority of child laborers continue to toil away in the countryside. It is significant to note that children from rural areas also comprise a significant percentage of the children who eventually end up in the worst and most exploitive forms of urban child labour. Poverty and child labor are inexorably linked; however, poverty can exist even when child

labour does not. Different groups can frame poverty in different terms, focusing on, income or consumption poverty, human development and underdevelopment, social exclusion, overall well being, vulnerability or an inability to meet certain basic needs. Child labour is strongly associated with income poverty and often reflects the fragility of a country's struggle toward greater economic prosperity (Castle and Diarra, 2004). In low-income countries, child labor historically declines when gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increases (EFA,2007). However, child labor is not only a symptom of poverty, it is a contributing factor. Child labor often consists of simple, unskilled routines that offer little opportunity for progression to better paying, more interesting or safer occupations. Many child laborers engage in invisible, unacknowledged and unregulated tasks, which can include hazardous work on family farming plots under the direct supervision of parents or caregivers. Local tradition and culture, as well as family solidarity, makes it

difficult to acknowledge that these children are being exploited. However, not all work that children perform on family farming plots is hazardous; a closer examination of these activities is necessary. Educating parents and caregivers on activities that are truly hazardous to children will empower them to make informed choices (CARE, 2007)

In addition to family farming plots, children work on, or accompany their parents or caregivers to, large agricultural plantations. This is common when school is too expensive, or too far from home, or when daycare is not an option. Since children are often seen as extensions of the family unit, they are not paid for their work on the plantations, and employers claim no responsibility for their health or safety. On cocoa plantations in West Africa, children do a variety of work that includes carrying cocoa beans to be dried, transporting foods such as plantains and cassava, and fetching water for drinking and irrigation. Their duties also include hazardous work like weeding with cutlasses, carrying and applying pesticides, and harvesting and splitting cocoa pods with a hook-shaped instrument referred to by locals as a “go to hell.”(CARE, 2007). Children are usually aware of the dangers they face, such as cuts, insect and snake bites, and skin irritation from applying pesticides — dangers they can also face while working on family farming plots — but there is little they can do. Plantation work is often seasonal; families migrate with the changes in season and crop cycle. As a result, children often miss large parts of the school year, or start school late. It is not uncommon for children enrolled in school to be sent to the fields to work during school hours.

## 2. The millennium development goals

The origins of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) lie in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which was adopted by all 189 UN Member States on 8 September 2000 (Grimsrud, 2003). By the year 2015, all 191 United Nations Member States have pledged to meet the following goals:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Progress report on the Millennium Development Goals

The progress report of the few Millennium Development goals that are likely to be affected by

the level of child labour in agriculture will be discussed here.

The proportion of the population living in relative poverty was expected to have fallen to 28.78 per cent in 2007, if the MDG target is to be met in 2015. However, among every ten Nigerians in that year, five were still living in poverty. An analysis of poverty incidence by sectors indicated that poverty was more pronounced in the rural areas than in the urban. Similarly, while poverty was more pronounced among farmers and larger households headed by persons with lower levels of education, income inequality was more pronounced in urban centers. Unemployment rate in Nigeria rose from about 12 out of 100 working age people in 1999 to 18 in 2005 with the rate of youth unemployment rising in the urban areas than in the rural (FGN, 2008).

Agriculture, which is the largest contributor to the country's GDP, is very central to achieving this goal. However, some challenges are militating against effective performance of the sector. These included addressing the dominance of aged people in agriculture, promoting the use of, and increasing access to, modern implements. Net enrolment ratio in primary education has consistently increased. From about 8 in every 10 eligible children in 2004, it increased to 9 in 2007 as a result of the implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. This was complemented with the upsurge in the establishment of private primary schools. Literacy rate has also continued to increase; the urban areas have, however, fared better relative to the rural areas.

Universal primary education is improving gradually but inequality continues to subsist in various aspects of life of men and women in Nigeria. For instance, the proportion of girls enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education is still lower than that of boys (about 8 girls to every 10 boys), but there is a positive trend in girls' enrolment for all levels of education. For primary school enrolment, there was sustained increase in girls' enrolment from 2000 to 2007, while in the secondary schools, a steady increase in girl's enrolment was observed from 2005 when about 9 girls to every 10 boys were in school. Women are still grossly under-represented at the highest decision making levels, such as the National Assembly.

Remarkable progress has been made on HIV & AIDS since 2003. For instance, the prevalence rate of HIV & AIDS dropped from about 5 in every 100 Nigerians in 2003 to about 4 in 2005. This reflected a downward trend in HIV & AIDS prevalence. Among pregnant women aged 15-49 years, this has also declined over the last few years (from 6 out of every 100 pregnant women aged 15-49 years in 2001 to 5 in

2003 and 4 in 2005). The number of AIDS orphans was estimated at 1.97 million, which mark them as a major vulnerable group in the country. Since HIV prevalence in the younger age bracket (15-24 years) is generally accepted to be indicative of the level of HIV incidence, this development suggests a modest decline in the number of new infections in the country (FGN, 2008).

### 3. Nigeria and child labour policies

Nigeria has ratified convention No. 138, the Minimum Age Convention No. 182, the worst forms of child labour convention, both in 2002 (ICFTU, 2005). The constitution states that primary education should be provided free and compulsory "when practical". However, in practice access to education is very limited due to lack of facilities. Girls have less access to education than boys. Net primary school enrolment for girls was over 33 percent over the period of 1998 - 2002. For boys this percentage was 38 percent over the same period. The minimum age for employment is 15 years in most sectors; however, child labour is widespread in Nigeria. Children younger than 15 years can only be employed in home-based agricultural or domestic work, but not in commerce and industrial work, and they are not allowed to work more than 8 hours per day (ICFTU, 2005). In 2000, the ILO estimated that 23.5 percent of children between 10 and 14 were working. Children are mainly employed in agriculture (on family farms), in fishing and herding, but also on commercial farms. Furthermore, they are employed in the informal economy as domestic workers, street vendors, car washers, beggars and vendors in markets.

Some children work in small industries as mechanics, metal workers, carpenters, weavers and barbers. Child begging is widespread in Nigeria and child prostitution is a serious problem in main cities in Nigeria.

ILO and the Nigerian Government (Federal Office of Statistics) (2003) estimated the number of working children at 15 million, of which up to 40% is at risk to be trafficked for forced labour. Of these working children, 6 million do not attend school and 2 million work more than 15 hours per day (ICFTU, 2005). Child labour inspection is limited to the formal economy where the level of child labour is relatively low and in the informal sector where child labour is high, there lack of inspectors.

It is important to observe that the government in the pre-independence era was not indifferent to child welfare. For instance, the Children and Young Persons Law (CYPL) in several states in Nigeria contained laws regulating street trading and the fact that in the 1960's, at least four (4)

ILO conventions prohibiting children's work in various hazardous occupations and conditions were ratified. However, the enactment of the Labour Code in 1974 with several provisions to limit the age of admission into employment in various occupations as well as limits the working hours and exposure to hazards was a decisive legal action, which demonstrated the stance of government towards achieving child welfare. The ratification and signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991 represented the climax in government's positive stance to combat child labour in view of the fact that one of its articles targets the elimination of the phenomenon (Oloko, 1999). Article 32 enjoins state parties to recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (UNICEF, 2001). In addition, the effort of government on child welfare precipitated former President Olusegun Obasanjo to sign into law the child right bill in June 2006. Other efforts by government and non-government organisations include:-

1. Section 31 of Cap 32 of the laws of the Federation of Nigeria, which prohibits children under 14 years and girls less than 16 years from trading in the streets.
2. Centre for Non-Formal Education and Training (CENFET) provides basic education for out-of-school and working children especially scavengers.
3. The "Hawking by children Edict Cap 58 Law of Nigeria".
4. The Nomadic Education Programme under the National Commission for Nomadic Education promulgates by Decree 41 of 1989 was the major programme that has been established for children who have never attended school. It was established in recognition of the fact that the migratory nature of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen made it difficult for their children (who invariably work with their parents) to be enrolled in formal education.

It is sad to note that these efforts have made marginal impact on improving child welfare or specifically reducing incidence of child labour and street children (UNICEF, 2001). This is largely because these measures have been uncoordinated, not well implemented and largely unenforced. For instance, studies conducted by various researchers in Nigeria.; Imam (1998); Onuiké (1998) Oloko (1999); Okpukpara and Odurukwe (2003) and UNICEF (2004); shows that the child labour and street children are increasing in both practices and characteristics. It was also reported that gender restrictions in the

involvement of children in work in certain crafts were found to have been eroded such that increasingly boys and girls were engaged in most occupations. UNICEF reported that in the year 2000 there were 233 million children between the ages of 5 – 18 years in urban areas in developing countries doing one kind of paid work or the other (UNICEF, 2004).

This development has grave economic and development consequences for studies have condemned child participation in economic activities and worst form of it (street children) because of its resultant effect on health, schooling, physical, moral and psychological development of the child (UNICEF, 2004; ILO-IPEC, 2002).

#### **4. Child - workers in agricultural commodity markets**

An evaluation of youths' participation in portage services in Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Nigeria by Oshotimehin et al. (2007). The issue of the active involvement of children in the Nigerian agricultural markets in Ogbomosho revealed that most of the participants were hired into the business due to such factors as poverty, family psycho-social problems. The child-workers used head portage, wheel barrow and two-wheeled carts to transport cassava tubers from the markets to the various processing points of their employers. Minority (32%) of them are in the business on full time while the remaining 67.5 percent do it on part-time basis usually after returning from school, during holidays and weekends. They showed that on the average income these youngsters earned is about N265.00 per day. Though the employment seems to be lucrative with respect to the present day structure in the public services, this study is of the opinion that Nigerian youths should be discouraged from further participation in such activities, since it affects their schooling and personal development. Most importantly, no special skills are being acquired in the work. This is impacting on their future survival and contribution to the economy of the nation. Lawal and Akintayo (2007) in Oyo State, Nigeria shows that children producing vegetables fell between the ages of 14 and 17 and more male children were involved than females. Major reasons for venturing into vegetable production include income generation, family sustenance and supplementation of school fees. Hazards children were exposed to include physical, environmental and educational hazards. ILO (2007) opined the existence of child labour in cocoa farms in Ondo State of Nigeria and over 1,500 children were withdrawn from child labour, mainly through education/training options or health services, or prevented from starting

such work. Over 500 parents/ guardians were trained in various income generating activities. In Nigeria, WACAP's awareness-raising efforts centered on getting articles in national dailies and news and features on television. The Ministers of Information and Labour were reported as praising WACAP for championing the campaign to eradicate child labour in agriculture (ILO, 2007).

#### **5. Suggested measures to reduce child labour for national development**

According to Udry (2004), the most effective way to draw children out of damaging work is to encourage school attendance. One way of doing so would be to improve school quality, and therefore increase the gain to attending school. Handa (2002), for example, argues that school enrollment in Mozambique is quite sensitive to the number of trained teachers. This is an important tool that is available to reduce child labor.

The most promising tool yet developed for reducing child labor is a targeted subsidy to families sending their children to school. In such a program, a grant is provided to the family of any child who is enrolled in school. The particular value of this intervention is that it addresses the root causes of child labor. It overcomes the problems associated with imperfect or nonexistent financial markets by balancing the current cost of moving a child out of the labor force and into school with a current grant. It addresses the main agency problem by providing current resources, thus, reducing the importance of intergenerational transfers. Subsidies for school enrollment to be a useful tool in the effort to reduce child labor.

Child labor can effectively be reduced by subsidies for school enrollment. This tool dominates alternatives because it addresses directly the tragic circumstances that impel families to send their children to work instead of school. An effective subsidy program is not unreasonably expensive because the costs are tied to the low wages earned by child workers.

#### **6. Women at crossroads as agents of change**

Women are to be on the frontlines of the fight against child labor. An empowered woman that understands the dangers associated with hazardous and exploitative child labor, and the power an education can have on changing the future for her children, can help reduce the number of child laborers and those at risk of becoming child laborers. An investment in women is an investment in

combating and ultimately eliminating child labor (CARE, 2007).

Women possess the skills and knowledge necessary for galvanizing community action to reduce and eliminate child labor, and improve the quality of community-level education.

Women stand at the crossroads when it comes to their impact on child labour. Empowered women are keenly aware of the dangers associated with child labour, and have proven vital to the success and sustainability of child-labour efforts. On the other hand, women that are unaware of the hazards and exploitative conditions children face, and the power of education to mitigate these dangers, can fuel the premature entry of children into the workforce, contributing to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates. A comprehensive analysis of how women can mitigate or exacerbate rates of child labour is urgently needed.

### 7. Economic alternatives for families

When families have resources, knowledge and opportunities to develop alternative forms of income, parents and caregivers are more likely to withdraw their children from hazardous and exploitative child labor and encourage them to attend and complete school.

Adult family members gain knowledge, skills other capabilities that allow them to find alternative employment opportunities, increasing their incomes and eliminating the need for their children to work. According to CARE (2007), some action plans needs to be in place for success and these plans are

- Skills-training programs for parents and caregivers that will help increase their incomes and further their personal development.
- Long-term commitments from families, donors, implementing agencies and local partner NGOs are secured at the outset of a project, and continue even after the project ends.
- Projects that have a market-oriented focus.
- Vocational training programs provide former child laborers and those at risk with valuable life skills. The programs should take into account the needs of the local labor market as well as the opinions and beliefs of youth, parents and caregivers - including mechanisms for holding trainers accountable.
- Alliances with employers and technical institutions enable education programs to offer training in job-related skills.

### 8. Conclusions

To understand the household reactions to public interventions is critical in designing

programmes in order to achieve the MDGs. The research on child labour represent in this respect a largely untapped resource of knowledge for policymakers in the fields of education and poverty reduction programmes. In particular the research on child labour brings about vital information on the role of the labour market in fighting poverty, but these links are not made in the intervention programmes.

This paper has shown how child labour not only derives from poverty but adds to it through its effects on the labour market and education system. Eliminating child labour requires determined action across a broad front – economic, social and cultural norms. It cannot be eliminated solely by government action. A broad and committed coalition is needed – including educational institutions, teachers' organizations, NGOs, mass media and community-based organizations, along with support from trade unions and employers' organizations. The first task is to ensure effective legislation. This is important but not sufficient. Most countries already prohibit child labour, and a small but growing number are establishing systems to monitor the situation and enforce the laws.

### 9. Recommendations

It is recommended in this paper that the legislators in Nigeria should enact laws that will reduce agricultural child labour through the redistribution of the nations resources, women should be integrated in the fight to combat child labour and that alternative income sources should be provided for rural poor families whose children are the most vulnerable.

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**Acronyms:** CARE, Cooperative For Assistance And Relief Everywhere; CENFET, Centre For Non-Formal Education And Training; CYPL, Children And Young Persons Law; EFA, Education For All; FAO, Food And Agricultural Organisation; FFE, Food For Education; ICFTU, International Confederation Of Free Trade Unions; ILO, International Labour Organisation; IPEC, International Program On The Elimination Of Child Labour; NGO, Non-Governmental Organisation; SARD, Sustainable Agriculture And Rural Development; UN, United Nations; UNCRC, United Nations Convention On Rights Of The Child; UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund; WACAP, Programme To Combat Hazardous And Exploitative Child Labour In Cocoa/Commercial Agriculture In West Africa.